

## Positive vs. Negative Laughter By Patt Harper

*“The power of humor is like a magnet: positive attracts, negative repels. Use it wisely.” –Darren LaCroix, speaker*

If someone must pay for our laughs the price is too high. Sarcasm and insults all come under the category of toxic humor. Laughter is not helpful if it's harmful. The most effective laughter has its roots in kindness, sensitivity and respect. Positive laughs create rapport, trust and bonds. Negative humor generates hostility, distrust and paranoia.

For a long time I believed a laugh was a laugh. I also felt teasing was harmless and that the person I was jabbing would know “I was only joking.” One day I greeted an acquaintance in a restaurant with “they’ll let anyone in here.” To my surprise, a look of horror and hurt covered her face as she replied, “Why? Shouldn’t I be here?” No matter how hard I tried to back pedal and apologize, the damage had already been done. I realized that not everyone shared my perception of humor. Since that day my greetings have become more flattering such as, “I see only the best people dine here.” Making people feel good is a much more fulfilling purpose of laughter.

We always need to laugh with others, not at them. Sometimes we feel it is OK to laugh at people in authority as long as they don't know about it. Many times we find ourselves with a group of co-workers and get caught up in very harmful humor. We start making fun of the way a supervisor looks or we repeat jokes we've heard about a famous celebrity. Although it may never get back to the person, we are conditioning ourselves to look for faults and we forget that they are real people. It also can make others distrust us and begin to think, “What does (s)he say behind my back?”

Self-effacing humor is often perceived as the safest and most effective form of laughter. By poking fun at yourself you show that you are human and recognize your own shortcomings. It makes others feel privileged that you trust them enough to share something so personal. And it relaxes others by demonstrating that you are a regular person – just like them. But be careful to poke gently. You don't want to appear that you are looking for sympathy or validation. You want people to laugh with you, not at you. Tell personal stories where the lesson is learned at your expense. Laugh at what you do – not who you are.

Life is full of things to laugh about without making people the target. You can laugh at behaviors but not persons or groups of people. The power of positive laughter creates confidence, respect and motivation, both for the giver as well as the receiver. Negative humor may have become socially acceptable, but it has no merit. Don't succumb to the temptation of using sarcasm and teasing. There are

so many positive things to laugh about if we just look for them. *“Nothing is quite as funny as the unintended humor of reality.”* Steve Allen.

**Patt Harper is a motivational humorist, trainer and author. She has spoken before and worked with organizations across the United States and Canada. Her hands on presentations are designed to teach participants to use humor more effectively and be well in mind, body, and spirit. Patt is a Certified Laughter Leader through the World Laughter Tour organization. Learn more at [www.LAFF4Life.com](http://www.LAFF4Life.com). You can contact her at [patthaha@aol.com](mailto:patthaha@aol.com).**